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Singapore takes steps to eliminate Hepatitis C

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MoU signing between HCSA Community Services and Tzu-Chi Foundation to support Hepatitis C elimination



HCSA Community Services and Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalise support for Phase 2 of the Educate, Test, Treat! (ETT) initiative, which has been supported by biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences since its launch in 2022.

The initiative encourages former drug offenders and those in recovery from addiction to take up Hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing and treatment and work towards the World Health Organization's goal of eliminating HCV by 2030.

The MoU exchange was witnessed by Mdm Rahayu Mahzam, Minister of State, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Digital Development and Information.

To date, over 270 individuals have received HCV testing through the ETT initiative from participating halfway houses — HCSA Highpoint, Pertapis Halfway House, Selarang Halfway House, The Helping Hand and Teen Challenge Singapore. Of those who tested HCV-positive, 41% were successfully linked to care and 43% of diagnosed patients have received treatment. This was complemented by the ETT befriender initiative, an integrated support system for HCV-positive patients that ensures they receive guidance throughout their treatment journey, which also encourages adherence and completion of treatment.

The support from Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore) thus far has enabled HCV-positive cases under the ETT initiative to receive treatment. Tzu-Chi Foundation (Singapore) is further pledging SGD83,000 this year to support HCV treatment for diagnosed individuals of the ETT initiative. Former drug offenders represent a group at increased risk of HCV infection because the virus is transmitted primarily through infective blood and bodily fluids, such as through the sharing of contaminated needles. A 12-week course of oral medication is highly effective in treating HCV in patients. HCV infections are typically asymptomatic until decades later when symptoms develop. Left untreated, chronic HCV may lead to serious health problems, including liver damage, liver failure, and liver cancer.